

The Road to a New Unified Command



By ROBERT T. MOELLER and MARY C. YATES

On October 1, 2007, with the confirmation of its first commander, U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) was officially declared at “initial operating capability” (IOC). Shortly thereafter, its newly assigned leadership assembled for a 1-day offsite conference to concentrate on two vital tasks: building the new team and hammering out a statement of the command’s mission.

The participants were an energized mix that included Active and Reserve military from all Services and civilians from the Department of Defense (DOD), Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International

Development (USAID). Participation crossed ranks from senior general officers to lieutenant colonels. It included those who were involved with the command as far back as 2006, when USAFRICOM was just an idea, as well as some who arrived after IOC and others who were on temporary duty, designated for but not yet assigned to the command. The result was a lively dialogue to which everyone contributed. In essence, the offsite demonstrated horizontal integration and helped establish the command’s direction over the following months. All agreed it was the right way to do business.

It is indeed rare that those in the joint or Service communities are given the

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Ugandan soldiers train with U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Regiment Soldiers

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Jeremy T. Lock)

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opportunity to participate in the establishment of a new command, so one could expect to see high energy and excitement generated during formative events such as the first offsite. But getting the command to IOC and subsequently to unified command status took a great deal of hard work and intellectual capital. Dedicated professionals from DOD, State, and other agencies worked together to create an innovative command well suited to meet the unique requirements of the diverse African environment. They also tackled the tedious and detailed work of transferring missions from three other unified commands, growing the command's manpower by a factor of six, and constructing a headquarters footprint out of limited facilities at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany, the Cold War home of the U.S. Army VII Corps.

The purpose of this article is to highlight both the innovations and intellectual work that took USAFRICOM from concept to reality. There are many lessons learned from this experience that will be useful if another unified command is created.

Background

The U.S. Africa Command was created to strengthen our security cooperation efforts with the nations of Africa and to

bolster the capabilities of our African partners. Through persistent, sustained engagement focused on building partner security capacity, supporting humanitarian assistance efforts, and providing crisis response, USAFRICOM will promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy. On September 30, 2008, USAFRICOM assumed mission responsibility as a unified command and serves as the DOD lead for support to U.S. Government agencies and departments responsible for implementing U.S. foreign policy in Africa. To appreciate the value of what the command has become, a brief review of the events leading to IOC follows.

The idea of an Africa command was not new, but until recent years, the continent of Africa remained a lower national security priority. The marked changes in the African strategic environment and the increase in bilateral security assistance and partnership activities during both the Clinton and Bush administrations suggested that our relationship with Africa was expanding, and the Unified Command Plan (UCP) might need to evolve in kind. The continent is growing rapidly in economic, social, political, and military importance in global affairs. It is democratizing at a rapid rate, with more

nations empowering their citizens through multiparty elections than ever before.

As institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) were becoming more important, the UCP was not set up to work with Africans in collective groups. One example was the fact that the AU headquarters was aligned with the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) but located in Ethiopia, which was aligned within the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility. Indeed, the seam between USEUCOM and USCENTCOM split interested parties in a number of key security issues, most notably the conflict in Darfur. The existing divisions did not support an effective approach to prevent and respond to humanitarian crises, improve cooperative efforts to stem transnational terrorism, or sustain enduring efforts that contribute to African unity and bolster security on the continent.

With respect to Africa, it was clear that the UCP needed updating. DOD needed a command to work exclusively on African security issues. In summer 2006, the Secretary of Defense tasked the department to analyze and make recommendations regarding adjustments in the UCP, including the potential creation of a unified command, to better align with national interests and security

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requirements. The initial recommendations concurred that a new command was needed for Africa, so the Secretary directed the establishment of an Implementation Planning Team (IPT) in November 2006 to develop options for creating a command to facilitate security cooperation programs in Africa. The IPT consisted of members of the security assistance divisions from USEUCOM and USCENTCOM, DOD representatives, and senior representatives from the Department of State and other U.S. Government agencies. Its primary function was to develop the concept plan for the new command's establishment, including initial location, mission and purpose, organizational structure, and timelines. The IPT plan was submitted to the



U.S. Air Force (Mark Harper)

Tanzanians fill buckets from water pump inspected by members of CJTF–Horn of Africa

President, who on February 7, 2007, directed the establishment of USAFRICOM, stating that the command should be fully operational by the end of fiscal year 2008.

Toward the Mission

With that, in February 2007, the 60-person U.S. Africa Command Transition Team was established in Kelley Barracks, only a short drive from USEUCOM headquarters. The team's tasks were to:

- develop an organizational structure that integrated DOD military and civilian personnel with the interagency community. This would be an important step toward facilitating an interagency approach to security issues that did not fall singularly within DOD purview.

- establish two management focus areas: civil-military activities and military plans and operations. Civil-military activities were expected to comprise a significant amount of the command's efforts. Therefore, naming a senior State official to oversee those efforts as a deputy was proposed in addition to having a military deputy.

- seek ways to enhance command presence and effectiveness at the Country Team level across the continent. In terms of Offices of Security Cooperation and other agencies, the U.S. military presence in Africa is small. Given expectations of increasing activity in the form of missions, activities, programs, and exercises, DOD presence within the Embassies deserved another look.

- establish a regional presence on the African continent that would facilitate appropriate interaction with existing African political-military organizations. Similarly, the team looked at the potential for establishing the headquarters in Africa, in whole or in part. The hypothesis was that being in Africa would facilitate the partnerships that we want to build and improve the efficiency of our programs and activities.

The initial work of the transition team led to the publication of the *AFRICOM Implementation Guidance* (AIG), signed by the Secretary of Defense in June 2007. This document formalized the parameters, requirements, and timelines for the transition team's activities. Meanwhile, teams comprised of members from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the transition team, and other agencies visited the continent to consult with leaders of various African nations about the command.

In late September, General William E. "Kip" Ward, then-deputy commander of U.S. European Command, was confirmed as the first commander of U.S. Africa Command. On October 1, 2007, the transition team officially disbanded, and USAFRICOM was at IOC as a subunified command under USEUCOM.

Unfortunately, the consultations held prior to IOC were insufficient to ensure our partners understood the intent and purpose of the command. With respect to the Africans, the pace of the command's establishment combined with limited time and resources to engage meant that not all desired partners were consulted, while others were less than satisfied with the information provided. This allowed questions, concerns, and misperceptions to arise in the minds of some African leaders, the media, and segments of the African populace. Meanwhile, consultations with U.S. Embassies were also insufficient to permit the Country Teams to help address these questions and concerns. Consequently, USAFRICOM was not universally welcomed. It was clear that strategic communication needed to be an immediate focus for the command.

However, more communication would not work; it had to be focused. Some Africans suggested that the priority for engagement

intent behind the command, and requested the input of the chiefs of mission on how the command could best support their needs. Mission authority over all U.S. Government activities within a host nation was the commander's primary message.

The commander also established three strategic communication themes that comprised the main message of the command: building the team, enabling the work of Africans, and adding value and doing no harm. This message was then carried to our partners in a series of consultations on the continent along with numerous engagements with the media, other U.S. agencies, defense industry and private enterprise, and other audiences.

Building the team had two components, internal and external. In the first months, the command nearly tripled in size, and a steady rate of rapid growth was projected over subsequent months. This placed a premium on training, education, and space to ensure the new team got settled quickly. Externally, we understood the importance of listening to and learning from our partners. Therefore, we invited them to give counsel and help the command form to best foster the development of security assistance programs.

Enabling the work of Africans, alternatively referred to as "African solutions to African challenges," reinforced the

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should be with the AU and its RECs first, rather than continuing the bilateral approach with various African nations. Therefore, the commander's first visit to the continent was to the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, while the deputies visited the RECs. Media engagement was important as we wanted visibility and to demonstrate openness and transparency to help build the relationships we needed. At the same time, directors and staff members engaged with nongovernmental organizations, think tanks, academia, defense industry groups, and others.

An important first step was to engage the U.S. Ambassadors to Africa. It was fortunate that the Department of State was hosting its annual Sub-Saharan Africa Chief of Mission Conference in Washington, DC, shortly after IOC. The commander addressed the conference, described the purpose and

USAFRICOM goal to respect African sovereignty and support the development of the necessary capacity for Africans to provide for their own security.

Adding value and doing no harm were two sides of the same coin, focusing on improving the many ongoing collective, significant, and diverse security cooperation programs on the continent, while not disrupting or confusing current security and stabilizing efforts. We stressed the desire to ensure that U.S. military efforts were harmonized with those of other agencies to maximize the effectiveness of our programs in Africa. The Department of State held the lead role in setting policy, and the command would take no actions without the consent of the U.S. Chiefs of Mission.

Additionally, there was one issue that remained a source of concern among many

Africans—the question of USAFRICOM presence on the continent. During the transition team period, there were open discussions about the desire to include some form of headquarters presence on the continent in order to facilitate our engagements with partners and ultimately deliver better programs. The discussions were largely conceptual and formative and did not result in a request to any nation to host the command. Still, U.S. Africa Command's number one priority is programs, and we explained to our partners that the management and execution of programs in Africa were intended to add further value by establishing some form of presence and that we desired to consult with partners to develop ways ahead. The same reassurances were addressed through engagement with African media to reach out to a wider audience.

Organizing for Success

U.S. Africa Command's innovative nature was another point that needed explanation. How it would be innovative, and why

it would be markedly beneficial, were tougher to explain and measure.

Functionally Structured, Horizontally Integrated. The headquarters is structured to function differently from other unified commands in many ways. USAFRICOM considered security assistance programs and partnerships as the primary activities of the command and designed the headquarters accordingly, while also recognizing the need to be prepared to conduct military operations as directed by the President. It was determined early on that the traditional J-code structure was not the best model, so the IPT and transition team set out to design a new one. The design was not to be static but instead was to evolve as we learned more about what worked best. The first major innovation was the establishment of cross-functional directorates. Some are

completely new, while others combine functions in different ways.

The newest and most innovative directorate is Outreach. Partnership, engagement, and strategic communication are functions that have grown in importance for any unified command, but USAFRICOM is the first to dedicate a directorate to them. Outreach consists of three divisions. The Partnership Division manages contacts with interagency, intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and multinational agencies that have or could potentially have interests in Africa that impact the command's mission. The Strategic Communication Division manages the strategic communication plans and activities of the command and runs the strategic communication working group that includes members from across the headquarters to ensure the consistent application of themes and messages.

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Rwandan Defense Forces prepare to board flight to Sudan as part of NATO response to African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur

435th Air Base Wing (Marc I. Lane)

The Directorate of Intelligence and Knowledge Development is a significant extension of the J2 (Intelligence). Going beyond traditional intelligence functions, this directorate helps the command understand the strategic environment in Africa from the perspectives of others. However, the nature of the environment places a greater premium on collecting and analyzing data from open sources and engagement with host nation, nongovernmental, and various nontraditional partners. Directorate members also recognize that they should share this information more openly and transparently than traditional intelligence functions are accustomed to. The directorate captured this spirit in the term *YESFORN*, a play on *NOFORN* or “no foreign nationals.” The goal is to integrate our knowledge development capabilities with those of our partners so we can have timely, actionable knowledge of the environment that will help in preventing conflict.

The Directorate of Operations and Logistics consolidates the management of functions associated with military operations. Divisions within this directorate include current operations, future operations, information operations, antiterrorism, engineering, logistics support, medical, and the Deployment and Distribution Operations Center.

The Directorate of Strategy, Plans, and Programs performs the analogous functions for security assistance, but also prepares the command strategy and performs contingency planning. The Engagement Division provides the country desk officers who prioritize theater security cooperation activities and assist with the political-military interface, while the Security Cooperation Plans Division executes those activities. This division also oversees and manages the Offices of Security Cooperation stationed in Africa.

The Directorate of Resources is more than just a combination J1 (Human Resources) and J8 (Comptroller). It also serves as the command’s transformation directorate, monitoring advances in applicable strategic research, science, and technology.

The Directorate of Command, Control, Communications, and Computers (C4) Systems is chartered with information architecture (including in Africa), information assurance, and systems support. Also, a new special staff branch, Knowledge Management, establishes the command’s knowledge management business practices and researches tools to permit collaboration

and information-sharing throughout the command.

Even though these directorates consolidate critical functions, horizontal integration is still essential for mission accomplishment as many activities impact the whole headquarters. Strategic communication is an excellent example. Consequently, USAFRICOM has taken several steps to inculcate horizontal integration. During the IOC year, the command conducted an extensive study of its boards, bureaus, centers, cells, and working groups.

Interagency Personnel Leading the Command. All the unified commands are increasing their emphasis on interagency participation, but U.S. Africa Command is taking that one step further with the placement of interagency personnel in leadership positions throughout the command. The most notable is the establishment of two deputies to the command, one interagency civilian and one military, serving equally under the commander. The deputy to the commander for civil-military activities (DCMA) is a senior Department of State official who supervises U.S. military coordination with other U.S. Government agencies working in Africa and directs the command’s civil-military plans and programs, outreach, and strategic communication effort. The DCMA also has lead responsibility for policy development, resourcing, and program assessment for the command’s theater security cooperation program. The deputy to the commander for military operations directs the command’s military-to-military relationships and operations in support of U.S. Government programs and exercises military command authority in the commander’s absence.

reach is another senior State official. A senior USAID official serves as the director of programs, one of the divisions under the Directorate of Strategy, Plans, and Programs. A Department of Commerce official serves as the deputy director of resources. These directors have the same authorities and responsibilities over their staffs as any other director within the command, with a notable exception: they cannot command U.S. forces during military operations.

Members of other agencies also play prominent roles as senior advisors to the commander. For example, USAID has provided a development and humanitarian assistance advisor who reports directly to the DCMA. The Department of the Treasury has provided a senior advisor now working within Strategy, Plans, and Programs, as is a senior Coast Guard officer from the Department of Homeland Security. These are in addition to the foreign policy advisor to the commander, a traditional advisory position provided by the State Department to unified commands.

Because of the invaluable subject matter expertise these interagency members provide, they are integrated into the command, placing them within the headquarters where their impact can be the greatest. We specifically avoided assembling or placing these and other potential advisors into a single collective such as a Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) that has been established in other unified commands. While JIACGs have been successful elsewhere, creating one in U.S. Africa Command would signal a sense of separation from the command, defeating the open and horizontal environment we consider vital.

the deputy to the commander for civil-military relations brings to the command years of expertise in African affairs and supervisory experience with Country Team members

The establishment of the DCMA position has been a positive innovation. It brings to the command years of expertise in African affairs and supervisory experience with Country Team members representing numerous U.S. Government agencies. These diverse skill sets offer in-depth subject matter expertise and organizational experience that greatly enhance the command’s ability to accomplish the mission.

Interagency leadership also extends throughout the staff. The director of out-

MAPEs

Establishing the command required hard work from the action officers to the senior leaders. The most complex activity of the IOC year was the mission transfer process that managed the acceptance of missions, activities, programs, and exercises (MAPEs) from USEUCOM, USCENTCOM, and U.S. Pacific Command. It was the ultimate horizontal activity. Several hundred MAPEs set for transfer from the three unified commands affected and involved everyone in the

command. The process had to be synchronized with U.S. Africa Command's growth because the transfers could only occur when the command had the manpower to continue the mission seamlessly—*do no harm*.

There are four broad categories of MAPEs, each different in scope and complexity. *Theater security cooperation activities* encompass our bilateral relationships with the militaries of each nation, the U.S. missions to that nation, and related programs such as Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training, and others. It also encompasses theater and regional

U.S. Joint Forces Command provided mentorship and training related to joint doctrine and operations to help form a unified command

theater security cooperation efforts such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. *Contingency planning* encompasses all activities related to preparation for crises (that is, what capabilities we may need). *Ongoing operations, training, and exercises* encompass current activities and operations—especially Operation *Enduring Freedom–Trans-Sahara* and Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF–HOA)—that must continue seamlessly. Meanwhile, U.S. Africa Command has had to initiate its own participation in *joint and defense business processes*, such as resourcing actions and engagements with

Congress, relying on the subject matter expertise of the other unified commands.

The MAPEs operations planning team held mission transfer conferences monthly with representatives of the other commands. Early in the IOC year, the team mapped out a detailed schedule for when USAFRICOM would accept missions from the other commands. Simpler missions requiring fewer resources were handled earlier, such as the responsibilities for humanitarian assistance activities. Also, as other commands were realigned with U.S. Africa Command, those missions transferred with them. For example, the USEUCOM J5–Africa Division was reflagged as the USAFRICOM Engagement Division under the Strategy, Plans, and Programs Directorate. More complex missions, such as CJTF–HOA, will be transferred later, but the transfer process included regular conferences so USAFRICOM could gain the subject matter expertise to command and control the operation. Also, as USEUCOM conducted crisis response activities or other missions in Africa, the USAFRICOM Operations and Logistics Directorate participated.

Staffing

Staff training was another major activity of the command. For this, U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) became involved. USJFCOM provided mentorship and training related to joint doctrine and operations to help form as a unified command and established a series of staff assistance visits during the year

that guided USAFRICOM through a deliberate process of forming business practices. These began with a 1-week workshop on our joint mission essential task list in January 2008, followed over subsequent months by staff process academics, tabletop exercises, and ultimately the September 2008 Command Post Exercise that certified our ability to operate as a unified command. These were helpful in bringing interagency members on board as they learned how unified commands operated.

The ACSS role was helping us understand the African environment. Although a number of transition team members had African experience, most did not, nor was there significant African experience among our IOC personnel. Consequently, ACSS conducted week-long workshops that detailed Africa's diverse history, cultures, development, and strategic challenges. As a supplement, we hosted regular professional development activities, such as Friday afternoon cinema presentations where a documentary or feature film covering an African historic event was played, followed by dialogue moderated by a subject matter expert, and the DCMA hosted a series of luncheon seminars to discuss aspects of African history and culture.

There are also the continuing challenges of forming the command outside the continental United States, such as establishing the legal agreements with the host nation, sponsoring the massive influx of military, civilian, and interagency personnel, and renovating facilities in Stuttgart to meet the operational and C⁴ requirements of a unified command.

Acquiring the desired interagency manpower for the command was challenging, mainly because many government agencies already faced manpower constraints. These agencies often lacked the resources to commit personnel, especially the high-demand experts whom we would prefer, without affecting their missions elsewhere. The differences in the personnel systems of various agencies offered challenges to the command's hiring and long-term assignment processes.

Our approach was to offer opportunities for short-term introductory assignments to the command. Some agencies sent personnel on temporary duty within U.S. Africa Command, usually between 2 weeks and 2 months. It was sufficient time to actively participate in important projects and educate the command on the unique capabilities and potential contributions of their organizations. Several returned to their agencies enthusiastic

Ambassador Stewart Symington welcomes Marines and Sailors to Djibouti



26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Freddy G. Centu)

about their participation and subsequently convinced their superiors that a more permanent commitment was beneficial, leading to an increase in interagency assignments.

Lessons Learned

Twice within this decade, the UCP has undergone a significant revision that resulted in the creation of a new unified command. The dynamics of the modern strategic environment suggest another major UCP revision could happen. Therefore, the following lessons learned will be instructive for executing the next revision.

The most important lesson concerns the strategic communication environment and the potential that it may not be friendly. We may view changes to the UCP as an internal DOD reorganization. Affected partner nations, their people, and other U.S. agencies may view it differently. We believe more dialogue with the affected partners is necessary in advance. Depending on the circumstances, group dialogues such as existing conferences of defense leaders or foreign ambassadors may have a greater chance of success than bilateral consultations. The goal is to provide partners with a chance to participate, provide counsel, and become stakeholders.

U.S. Ambassadors in Embassies abroad are a vital link in our relations with partners and need to be among the first consulted.

The strategic communication plan needs to be simple and should stress one theme over all others: reorganization will add value to the delivery of programs. This approach does two things. First, it provides a solid logical framework about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and what we are not doing. Second, if that framework demonstrates that it will not improve the ability to deliver programs, then the UCP revision ought to be reviewed further.

The second lesson learned is the importance of involving other unified commands, even those that fall outside the affected areas of responsibility. Our transition team—era engagements with USJFCOM, U.S. Northern Command, and U.S. Southern Command were fruitful but not sufficient. Each unified command is innovative, meeting the unique demands of its environment and the needs of its partners. Learning how they analyzed and assessed their requirements and developed solutions was extremely valuable as we determined our structure and business practices.

The third lesson is that a new unified command should be established as a full

unified command at the onset. Although placing U.S. Africa Command as a subunified command under the U.S. European Command through IOC gave us the ability to draw administrative, logistic, and mission support, it would have been more effective to establish the command as a unified command to enable the most challenging issues to be resolved upfront and not be deferred. It would have improved our ability to work issues with DOD, Joint Staff, and Service chiefs. This is especially important in manning and budgeting. It would also have established greater continuity of effort from the transition team to IOC.

The fourth lesson learned is the importance of planning for resources for key establishment activities such as mission acceptance and staff training. The influx of manpower and resources faced significant challenges in keeping with an aggressive timeline, which in turn affected the ability of USAFRICOM to accept missions and meet other milestones. In the spirit of “do no harm,” we accepted missions only when we were prepared to execute them. We recommend that future timelines for establishing new commands incorporate resource issues more closely so desired timelines can be met.

It is exhilarating to create a new command in order to reflect the growing importance of our African partners, but turning it into a reality requires incredible amounts of detailed work, dedication, and energy. We appreciate the efforts of all who contributed to our establishment—from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, other participating U.S. Government agencies, Country Teams in Africa, and fellow unified commands (especially U.S. European Command). We also thank those who participated in the Implementation Planning Team and transition team, and ultimately the Servicemembers, civilians, and contractors of U.S. Africa Command. Achieving full unified command status is a major accomplishment, one that leads to greater security and stability on the continent of Africa and its island nations. **JFQ**

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